Assimilation and community

The Jews in nineteenth-century Europe

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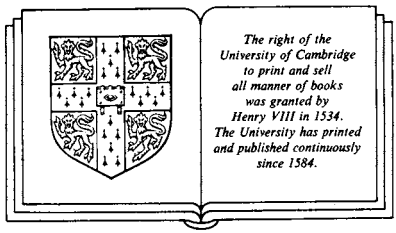

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Contents

Assimilation and the Jews in nineteenth-century Europe: towards a new historiography?

JONATHAN FRANKEL

The life and thought of the Jewish people in nineteenth-century Europe is rarely described today, in accord with the basic concept which dominated the history books until some twenty years ago. True, the process of revision has been anything but dramatic. Among the historians who write on nineteenth-century Jewry there have been no great public disputes over method or content, nothing comparable to the fierce debates engendered by the cliometric studies of American slavery, for example, or by the structuralist and deconstructionist schools in contemporary literary criticism. No revisionist school of historiography has proclaimed its existence in this field; nor, in many, perhaps even most, cases, were the individual historians involved aware (at least initially) of being engaged in a broader revisionist trend.

A major contribution to the change of perspective has undoubtedly been made by a number of American historians. But the re-mapping of modern Jewish history has not been confined to any one country (Israeli historians, too, have been strongly represented) nor to any one generation.

What became the historiographical orthodoxy in this field for a number of decades – in most marked form from the 1930s until the 1960s – had its origins in the Tsarist Empire. In general terms, it was a major by-product of the modern Jewish nationalism which surged up in the Pale of Settlement following the pogroms of 1881–2 and which, despite ebbs and flows, sustained its momentum throughout the reigns of Alexander III and Nicholas II.

More specifically, what can be called the Russian-Jewish school of history was, to all intents and purposes, initiated, inspired by one

man, Simon M. Dubnov. In an extraordinary burst of energy and creativity during the decade 1888–98, he laid down the basic guidelines for his own work during the rest of his life and for that of mainstream historians over a number of generations.[1]

In those years, Dubnov marked himself off from the great German-Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz (even while fully acknowledging his own discipleship). Where Graetz had written history from a theological and metaphysical perspective,[2] his own point of view would be secular and anthropocentric, taking as its ideal the empiricism of natural science. Where Graetz had seen the religious and national strands of Jewish history as inextricably and eternally intertwined, Dubnov came to regard it as axiomatic that the Jews were primarily a nation and that Judaism, the religion, was a secondary attribute which could be safely transformed, or even abandoned, according to circumstance.

Graetz had concentrated attention largely on intellectual and literary themes; Dubnov now emphasized communal history, the forms of autonomous self-government which had sustained the Jewish people through the millennia of exile. (And, of course, he linked this thesis to his own political ideology which demanded Jewish national self-government, autonomy within multinational and democratized states.)[3] Or, to take yet another divergence, where Graetz had been critical of all forms of Jewish mysticism, Dubnov now wrote his remarkable history of Hasidism, which described the movement as a socio-psychological response to mass distress, thus justifying it (at least during its period of genesis) in populist terms.[4]

Many factors combined to entrench and bring about the diffusion of the historiographical school which, although launched by Dubnov, soon took on a vigorous life of its own. With its stress on national politics, avowed secularism and the search for scientific certainty, it gave voice to, reinforced and in turn was sustained by the radicalism of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia in the late Tsarist period. This mode of history could appeal to Zionists, Territorialists, Bundists and Folkists alike, for even though their respective movements were bitterly divided over issues of means and ends, they shared a common faith in the triumphant power of modern nationalism.

By 1914, the increasing interest in Jewish history (above all Russian and Polish) had led to the establishment of a high-quality journal (*Evreiskaia Starina*);[5] of higher educational courses (the so-called Oriental Studies organized under the auspices of Baron David Gintsburg);[6] and of the Historical–Ethnograhical Society (in which

S. An-sky played so conspicious a role).[7] The monumental sixteen-volume encyclopedia (*Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*)[8] and the first part of Dubnov's *History of the Jews in Modern Times* had already been published.[9] Increasingly, contemporary political issues were linked in the Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian-language (Jewish) press in the Tsarist Empire, as well as in Palestine and America, to discussions of possible parallels, precedents and cautionary tales to be found in the national past.[10]

Again, many of the leading scholars of the next generation had by then been drawn into the field of modern Jewish history: B. Z. Dinaburg (Dinur), Z. Rubashev (Shazar), Elyohu Cherikover, Avrom Menes, to name just a few. And some of these, then still very young *intelligenty* would, in turn, exert a powerful influence on contemporaries, future historians, in Central Europe – the most famous example being, of course, Gershom Scholem who like many other German Zionists of his generation looked eastward for inspiration in his search for an authentic, uncompromised form of Jewish life. (Scholem himself would later note that in his circles 'there was something like a cult of Eastern Jews'.)[11]

In the interwar years, with the decline and eventual elimination of Jewish scholarship in the Soviet Union, the historiographical enterprise initiated in Tsarist times was able to re-root itself elsewhere. Two institutions in particular now developed as the central foci in this effort of reconstruction and renewal: the YIVO Institute (or Jewish Scientific Organization) in Vilna which established branches in Warsaw, Berlin and New York, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem – both founded in the same year, 1925. It was during the 1920s, too, that Dubnov, who was closely associated with YIVO, first published his ten-volume *Weltgeschichte des Jüdischen Volkes* which was very widely read (a Russian edition came out in Latvia in the 1930s)[12] and which, with its clear nationalist message, exerted increasing influence in the wake of the Nazi triumph in Germany.[13]

With the destruction of the Jews in Europe during the Second World War, the Hebrew University found itself almost the sole heir to the Russian (or by now, more exactly, Eastern European) school of modern Jewish historiography. YIVO survived in New York, the depository of a major library and archive, much of it salvaged from postwar Europe, but its research staff was very limited in size. And yet the rapid growth of the Hebrew University following the establishment of Israel in 1948, and the expansion of Jewish studies in the new state generally, meant that the tradition of historical scholarship

leading back to Dubnov was able not only to sustain itself, but was also revitalized to a remarkable extent, carried forward by new academic journals, specialized monographs and major works of synthesis.

It is a remarkable fact that all the major books which seek to analyse the history of the Jews across the entire expanse of the modern world belong within that tradition. Nearly all of them have long been available in English translation: the final volumes of Dubnov's *History of the Jewish People*;[14] Raphael Mahler's *A History of Modern Jewry*[15] (which, despite initial aims to the contrary, covers only a limited period) and Shmuel Ettinger's section in the Harvard *History of the Jews*.[16] To this list can be added Ben-Zion Dinur's collected essays (still not translated) in the volume *Bemifneh hadorot*.[17] These works have by now all attained classic status: they are painted on a vast canvas, based on extraordinary erudition and informed with impassioned concern.

Each of these historians, of course, had his own very distinctive viewpoint, method and style. Both Ben-Zion Dinur, for example, who was committed to a thoroughgoing Zionist ideology (including the concept of the 'negation of the Exile' – *shlilat hagalut*) and Raphael Mahler, with his Marxist version of Zionism, were inevitably in profound disagreement on key issues with Dubnov, the Diaspora nationalist, autonomist and bitter opponent of class-war ideology. And, none the less, beyond all these very real distinctions they shared with each other and with the mainstream historians at large, a number of basic perceptions which resulted, ultimately, from one overarching concept.

As they saw it, modern Jewish history was best understood in essentially dichotomous terms. Bipolarity served as the key, the paradigmatic principle which supplied these works with their underlying structure. On the one hand, there was the Jewish nation which had tenaciously survived almost two millennia of exile and dispersion by dint of its internal solidarity, faith and inventiveness. On the other, there were the combined forces of change which, unless creatively absorbed and organically integrated by the nation, could only set in motion a process of inexorable erosion and a process of self-destruction.

Ultimately, in the era after 1881, this existential collision would (in this view of things) be transformed by the emergence of the new nationalist movements which had found the way to combine tradition

and modernity in a new, a viable, synthesis. The national ideologies did not undermine but rather reinforced the unity of the Jewish people. The clash between the centrifugal and the centripetal forces, between disintegration and solidarity, between assimilation and community remained no less fundamental, but henceforward the scales would no longer be as heavily weighted against the group survival of the Jews.

In his analysis of modern European history, Dubnov developed the theory that during the periods of governmental liberalism and of a more open society the danger of national disintegration increased; while conversely reaction and resurgent Judeophobia acted to revitalize Jewish group solidarity:

> The internal processes of *assimilation*, on the one hand, and of *national consciousness* on the other, are closely tied to the external processes of emancipation and of reaction. The term 'assimilation' can be used to describe both the way in which either Jews are swept along, unconsciously as it were, into the current of the surrounding culture and also the way in which Jews consciously renounce their national identity – with the exception of the religious dimension – and come to include themselves in any given country as members of the dominant nation.[18]

Both Raphael Mahler and Shmuel Ettinger accepted the logic of this reasoning. Mahler placed particular emphasis on 1848. The revolutions of that year, he maintained, 'which for the world as a whole spelled progress, did not bring a Jewish rebirth, but on the contrary heralded a period of national disintegration and assimilation'.[19] And although Ettinger preferred to be less specific in dating the dynamics of assimilation he, too, could argue that,

> On the one hand, we find the centripetal force drawing individual Jews and various groups within the people to identify themselves with the Jewish past and with all Jews throughout the Diaspora, and on the other hand we see the centrifugal tendency pulling them apart and bringing them closer to their alien surroundings . . . There were periods, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the centrifugal forces predominated. But the spread of modern antisemitism and the Nazi Holocaust led to a radical change.[20]

For his part, Ben-Zion Dinur likewise interpreted the modern history of the Jews in terms of challenge and response, disintegration and reintegration, although it should be noted that he specifically

disassociated himself from Dubnov's concept of an almost regular ebb and flow:

> The feeling which was of such vital importance for all generations past – that the Jews constitute one people – now in modern times simply, as it were, evaporated. That uniform way of life which had made a Jew feel comfortable anywhere in the world from the moment that he set foot in a Jewish home was severely undermined, and in some countries it was reduced to little more than a memory from the lost past. The cultural co-operation which had linked the various communities had to all appearances come to a stop . . . The Hebrew which had acted as the cultural language of the united nation . . . had ceased to fulfil that function in most Jewish communities . . . And it is erroneous to associate these developments with specific periods of modern history, with particular periods of assimilation, of self negation. Rather, these phenomena represent permanent processes at work in all recent generations.[21]

The bipolar concept which was of such central importance here, then, in many ways served the historian well. It had a very strong emotive and political appeal; and as such it undoubtedly provided him with a source of inspiration, of energy. But, no less significantly, it acted as a compass, permitting him to orient himself in the vast and infinitely complex expanses of modern Jewish history. It made it possible to produce a coherent map of an otherwise all but incomprehensible terrain, to create order out of chaos.

However, at the same time, this concept encouraged the tendency to focus the spotlight on the extremes, thus leaving the middle ground, although certainly not out of sight, still in the shadows. And, likewise, it brought with it a view of the fundamental conflict as ultimately a clash of opposing beliefs, ideologies, ideals. Even Mahler concentrated attention primarily on ideology, even though as a Marxist he insisted that this dimension of history was the by-product of warring class interests.

It is above all, perhaps, in his analysis of two major themes in the development of the Jewish people during the nineteenth century (or, more accurately, during the hundred years from 1780 to 1880) – enlightenment and emancipation – that the historian first finds himself confronted by the clash between tradition and modernity. For the members of the nationalist school of history, this was no simple challenge, and the result was often paradoxical. As secular Jews, dedicated to the cause of critical scholarship, and no less as committed liberals or socialists they were obviously committed to the side of

'progress' against that of 'reaction'. But as nationalists analysing an era when tradition was in almost constant disarray and Jewish nationalism had as yet hardly emerged, they were pulled in exactly the opposite direction. If change spelled the end of community, or group survival, then even continued immobility was, in the last resort, to be preferred.

As a result, the Jewish Enlightenment movement – or Haskalah – was depicted in the classic works as positive in its original intentions but as profoundly flawed in its subsequent development. In so far and as long as the Haskalah movement, for example, employed Hebrew as its primary means of communication and even sought to bring about a literary renaissance in that language, it was seen as clearly acting within the communal, the national, framework. It represented a genuine attempt to combine the ancient and the modern in a new synthesis.

However, to the extent that the movement encouraged the replacement of Yiddish as the spoken, and Hebrew as the literary, language of the Jewish people by German (or whatever the official language was in any given state), it was treated in highly critical terms.

The linguistic issue was one of a number of the factors which combined to reduce sharply the status of Moses Mendelssohn, the dominant and founding figure in the German Haskalah movement. In the pre-nationalist era (or more specifically, until the publication of Peretz Smolenskin's attacks on the 'Berlin Haskalah' in such essays as his 'Am Olam' of 1872),[22] Mendelssohn had been almost universally admired within modernized Jewish circles ranging from that of neo-Orthodoxy led by Samson Raphael Hirsch to that of extreme Reform. He had combined (such had been the perception) all that was best in European and in Jewish culture, displaying absolute loyalty both to humanity and to the Jewish people, to the universal and to the particular.[23]

Dubnov, himself, in the early 1880s, before his conversion to the nationalist ideology, had still shared this view of Mendelssohn as the all but mythical figure, proud and harmonious, who had demonstrated to the Jews in the modern world how best to combine the old and the new.[24] But in his *History*, Dubnov, while acknowledging, *inter alia*, that Mendelssohn had been able to 'preserve an organic bond with his people whom he was anxious to enlighten and humanize',[25] was in many ways highly critical. In particular, he saw in Mendelssohn's translation of the Bible into German a major causal

link in a process which was bound eventually to undermine the very foundations of the community. By the early nineteenth century, he wrote:

> The number of Jews drawn into the process of assimilation was already most significant and was growing year by year. One of the signs of this process was the fact that the German and French Jews in Alsace had repudiated their own national [*narodnyi*] language, encouraged by the propaganda which had been conducted by the Mendelssohnian school ever since the translation of the Bible into German. The state language found its way into every sphere of the people's life, into the family and the school, into literature and even into the synagogue. The new generations steadily alienated themselves from Jewry: first the generation of Henrietta Herz, of Mendelssohn's daughters . . .; and then that of Börne and Heine, Marx and Lassalle – such were the stages of the cultural Reformation.[26]

On the subject of Yiddish, Raphael Mahler was if anything even sharper, although he was ready enough to acknowledge that Mendelssohn (among other things, one of the founders of the Enlightenment journal, *Hameasef*) had sought to raise the level of Hebrew as a classical language. But, as he saw it,

> [Mendelssohn's] contempt for the spoken language of the people expressed the view of the new Jewish middle class, its hope of resembling the country's ruling classes in all things . . . Neither he nor any of the other *maskilim* . . . realized that by jettisoning Yiddish, they were destroying one of the chief foundations of a distinct Jewish culture.[27]

The extremely rapid transition made by the Jews in Central Europe from Yiddish and Hebrew to German was to be regarded, then, as only one among many symptoms of a profound malaise. The Berlin Haskalah had proved itself incapable of mastering the spiritual forces required to assure Jewish group survival in the modern age. It was thus no wonder that nearly all Mendelssohn's children converted to Christianity or that the Berlin community was hit by a veritable 'plague' of baptism by the end of the eighteenth century. The ultimate act of self-degradation (always strongly emphasized in mainstream historiography) was the notorious suggestion made in 1799 by David Friedländer, one of the community's most prominent leaders and an associate of Mendelssohn's in the 1780s, that the Berlin Jews should consider entering the church *en masse* (albeit freed from the obligation to recognize some of the more supernatural articles of the Christian faith).[28]

In contrast to the Berlin Haskalah, the *maskilim* in Galicia and in the Tsarist Empire retained the use of Hebrew (and even, at times, of Yiddish) in many of the journals, newspapers and books (both scholarly and literary) which they published throughout the pre-nationalist era ending in 1881, and beyond. This fact was, of course, fully recognized by the historians of the national school, but none the less the Haskalah movement in the Habsburg and Romanov Empires was also subjected to critical scrutiny. It was perceived as lacking roots in its own ancient soil. 'The Haskalah influences that infiltrated East European Jewry', as Shmuel Ettinger put it, 'came from the cultural centres of the West, and above all from Berlin'.[29]

As an isolated group of would-be reformers, the *maskilim* frequently found themselves forced to seek an alliance of one type or another with the autocratic regimes in Vienna or St Petersburg. The readiness to look for support from this source of power could only be described in negative terms by historians who perceived the Austrian and Russian despotisms as fundamentally hostile to the interests, and ultimately even to the survival, of the Jewish communities in their countries (the only major exception to this rule being the government of Alexander II in his early years).

Thus Dubnov was scathing in his description of the *maskilim* who co-operated with Joseph II in an attempt to impose a state school system on his Jewish subjects. The Emperor, he wrote, sought to impose his experiments on 'the Jews of Galicia whom he undertook to "correct" by harsh police measures [aided by the *maskil*] . . . Homberg whose task it was to execute the "policy" '.[30] Mahler noted that the 'Galician Jews adopted innumerable schemes to evade the decrees of "dictated enlightenment" ',[31] and that the net effect of the support offered to Joseph II by the *maskilim* was to 'precipitate a conflict between Haskalah and ultra-Orthodoxy that raged throughout the nineteenth century'.[32] And Ettinger described the policies of Nicholas I and the response of the Jews in very similar terms: 'Various *maskilim* suggested to him [Uvarov, the Minister of Education] that he introduce these changes by coercive methods.' However,

> the authorities did not have Jewish interests at heart but intended rather to manipulate the beliefs and concepts of the Jews and even to induce them to convert . . . [And] the Jews protected themselves by every means at their disposal.[33]

The result was to arouse 'doubts in the Jewish mind regarding the loyalty of the *maskilim* to their people'.[34]

Surveying the Haskalah as a whole, Shmuel Ettinger saw it as a

transitional movement which had understood what was perhaps the basic issue facing the Jews in the modern world – 'how to preserve their Jewish identity within . . . a society that was abolishing corporative frameworks'[35] – but had failed to resolve it: 'The *maskilim* were the first to seek solutions to this problem, and although they did not achieve their aim, they induced Jewish society to seek out new ways for itself.'[36]

The subject of Jewish emancipation brought with it, if anything, even greater problems for the nationalist historian than that of the Haskalah. After all, the cause of equality before the law, full civil and political rights for the Jews, was one which made not only a rational but also a profoundly emotional appeal to Dubnov and those who followed him. Indeed, Dubnov and Dinur had both actively participated in the Russian revolution of 1905 which they had seen as aimed at liberty for all, regardless of nationality or religion. Their commitment to the cause of liberation, of emancipation, was absolute.

However, here again the same paradox was at work. The greater the liberty, equality and fraternity, the more powerful would become the centrifugal forces threatening the survival of the Jewish people – everywhere a small and scattered minority – at least until counterbalanced by new forms of national education, consciousness, autonomy, sovereignty. As already noted, Dubnov even saw in this logic a basic law governing the rhythm of modern Jewish history. The outcome tended to be that the historians described in detail and in highly positive terms the process of Jewish emancipation; and yet, at the same time, focused attention on the extremely negative impact which that process could exert on the will and ability of the Jews to survive as a collectivity in the modern era.

If Berlin dominated the historiography of the Haskalah, it was Paris which came to represent, to symbolize, the dangers inherent in the politics of liberation. In fact, Dubnov saw German thought and French political radicalism as the joint cause of crisis. Or, as he put it: 'The epoch of Mendelssohn and of the French Revolution developed in the upper strata of Jewish society a tremendous centrifugal force.'[37]

Two chapters above all in the story of the revolutionary period came to illustrate this theme. First, there was the long-drawn-out struggle, which lasted some two years, until the National Assembly finally decided in September 1791 to grant the Jews of France equal rights. From the many speeches delivered on this controversial subject in the Assembly, one in particular has been assigned special significance by the historiographical tradition: the statement made in

December 1789 by Clermont-Tonnerre in support of Jewish emancipation:

> Everything must be refused to the Jews as a nation; everything must be granted to them as individuals. Each of them should individually be a citizen. But it is claimed that they do not want this. Very well, let them say so and they will have to be expelled . . . There cannot be a nation within a nation.[38]

As Dubnov understood it, here was the key message, the unwritten contract, which made the grant of civil rights acceptable to the French state. 'The Jews', he wrote, 'were granted equality in civil rights on the assumption that in the given country they constituted not a national, but only a religious, group within the ruling nation.'[39] Shmuel Ettinger summed up the debate of the years 1789 to 1791 in similar terms:

> Their opponents claimed that the Jews were a separate nation and not only a religious entity and, therefore, unable to claim any political rights. Their supporters, on the other hand, agreed to accept them into society as individuals who would be expected, to a greater or lesser extent, to disavow their heritage.[40]

Second, particular attention was likewise concentrated on the Assembly of Jewish Notables and the Sanhedrin brought together respectively in the years 1806 and 1807 by Napoleon in Paris. It was there and then that the leadership of the Jewish people in France (and in French-controlled Europe) was called upon to pay the belated price, as it were, for the civil equality ceded in 1791. Several declarations made by the Jewish representatives have been considered particularly humiliating, among them the statement that 'their religion commands them [the Jews] to regard the law of the land in all civil and political questions as the law of Israel'; and, still worse, the assurance given that 'today . . . the Jews no longer constitute a nation and have been privileged to be included in this great [French] nation'.[41]

Of this latter and similar resolutions Dubnov wrote:

> Taking its stand from the first on the slippery slope of concession and utility the Assembly fell even further. And when the issue arose of the relationship between civil patriotism and Jewish national sentiment, . . . the servility of the Assembly knew no bounds . . . With apparent light-heartedness (although in all probability it cost the better delegates a real inner struggle), [it] renounced all pretensions to broad communal self-government.[42]

And for his part, Mahler was more scathing still, seeing here the joint effort of a counter-revolutionary despotism and of the established Jewish bourgeoisie. The assertion that the Jews had ceased to be a nation was, as he put it, 'an undisguised betrayal of the unity, dreams and historic efforts of the Jewish people'.[43]

Interpreted along these lines, enlightenment and emancipation, Berlin and Paris, had combined to set their stamp on the history of the Jewish people in the century which separated Mendelssohn from the proto-Zionism of Pinsker. They set in motion the dynamics of change which were to predominate until 1881. The result (as seen by the mainstream historiography) was a fundamental metamorphosis – an ever-widening gulf which came to mark off the Jews of Western Europe from the Jews of Eastern Europe. It was in the light of this process that the historians surveyed the unfolding of events over the entire continent for the best part of the century. The division between West and East became an explanatory key of central importance.

Here, too, ideological polarization served as a main theme. At one extreme stood the religious reform movement which first emerged in Germany during the late Napoleonic years but only developed a clearly defined theology and philosophy of history in the 1840s. And at the other, primarily in the Pale of Settlement, Congress Poland and Galicia, stood the world of traditional Judaism, still devoted to age-old religious practice and still ruled by deep loyalty to the Jewish nation.

Reform Judaism which, once entrenched as a major force in Germany, spread to the United States, Hungary and to a number of countries in Western Europe, was understood to be the archetypical product of the Haskalah and of the emancipation process combined. From the Enlightenment movement it took its extreme rationalism and naive universalism. And it was the fierce political struggle to obtain equal rights in Prussia and the lesser German states in the decade leading up to 1848 which had propelled the movement to undertake nothing less than a root-and-branch reformation of its theology. In order to prove the absolute loyalty of the Jews to state and country they were ready to remove from the prayer-books any reference to the age-old hope for a return to the ancient homeland in Palestine and to interpret the dispersion of the Jews across the world not as Exile but as of positive value, as the way for the Jews to carry the message of monotheistic ethics to all of mankind, as a divinely ordained mission. Thus, the Reform movement made it possible to claim that the Jews constituted a strictly religious community

divested of all national attributes, that they were Germans (or Poles or Frenchmen, as the case might be) of the 'Mosaic persuasion'.

In this way, reformed Judaism became the symbol, as it were, of a readiness to trade in age-old beliefs in exchange for civil equality and social acceptance. Writing of Abraham Geiger, one of the founding fathers of the movement (as well as of Samson Raphael Hirsch who, although neo-Orthodox, likewise stressed the strictly religious nature of the Jewish people), Dubnov argued that he had erred in denying

> the idea of the eternal [Jewish] *nation* . . . Geiger and Hirsch negated the Jewish people [*evreistvo*] as a national *individuum* and defined it as only a religious entity. In so doing, they reconciled themselves to *national* assimilation which, in the final resort, is bound to lead to the total dissolution of the Jews among the other nations – to the disappearance of that vital organism which sustains Judaism.[44]

The remark, by now much quoted, made by Geiger in a letter to Darenbourg in 1840 during the affair of the Damascus blood libel could be seen as typical. 'It is quite honourable', he then wrote, 'that eminent people are manifesting solidarity with their persecuted brethren, but . . . in my eyes it is more important that Jews in Prussia should be allowed to become pharmacists or lawyers than that Jews in Asia or Africa be rescued'.[45]

In contrast to the essential pusillanimity thus exemplified by the Reform movement was the stubborn refusal of the traditional Jews to desert their own way of life. Mahler could, for example, describe the struggle for the soul of Hungarian Jewry set in motion by the reforming theories of Aaron Chorin in the 1820s as 'a conflict that was to continue for several decades between the Orthodox and the Enlightened Hungarian Jews – between religious conservatism and national Jewish loyalty, on the one hand, and assimilation, on the other'.[46]

The two modes of Jewish life, however, were seen as divided not only by ideological and geographical but also by sociological factors. There was a major strand of populism in the thinking of Dubnov which was shared in large part by his students and successors; while, for his part, Mahler translated the general concepts of the 'people' or the 'masses', as opposed to the social elites, into specifically class terms. In his interpretation, the economic interests of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie lay at the root of its active 'assimilationism' and its antinational Judaism. (In so far as the Italian or American Jewish middle class did not feel pressured similarly by state and society to